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Affect toward the self and self-injury stimuli as potential risk factors for nonsuicidal self-injury

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Abstract

Few risk factors for nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI) have been identified. This study investigated diminished aversion toward self-injury (i.e., NSSI, suicide/death-related stimuli) and self-criticism as unique NSSI risk factors. After terminating a treatment study, 154 adults with a recent and frequent NSSI history completed self-report and computer-based measures of psychopathology, implicit and explicit self-criticism, and implicit aversion to NSSI and death related stimuli. Participants were then contacted 4 weeks later to test factors predicting NSSI frequency over this follow-up period. Diminished aversion toward NSSI stimuli and self-criticism significantly predicted NSSI 4 weeks later. These effects were unique from other theoretically important predictors, such as past week NSSI frequency and number of NSSI methods employed. Findings provide support that erosion of barriers to NSSI (e.g., aversion to self-injurious stimuli, decreased self-worth) may facilitate continued engagement in these dangerous behaviors. Results shed light on potential treatment targets for NSSI.

Keywords: NSSI; self-injury; risk factor; self-criticism; longitudinal; prediction

1. Introduction

Nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI) is defined as direct and deliberate self-injury enacted without suicidal intent (most often self-cutting; Nock, 2010). These behaviors are surprisingly prevalent; approximately 5.5% of adults and 13.4% of young adults report engaging in these

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